

# Nixon Criticizes Stories On Airport Incident

Key Biscayne, Fla.

The White House yesterday condemned as "unethical and unprofessional reporting" based on "rumor and gossip" news accounts that said President Nixon slapped a man at McCoy Air Force Base outside Orlando, Fla., Saturday.

The alleged victim described the President's action as "a friendly gesture" and a "tap" on the cheek.

Yesterday's Wall Street Journal reported that Mr. Nixon "soundly slapped the man's face and walked on" after the incident, which took place following the President's question-and-answer session with the Associated Press Managing Editor's Association.

Reports of the incident "distorted a friendly gesture," a White House statement said.

"This is an example of irresponsible and twisted accounts which have been circulated in recent months, without adequate substantiation and which create false impressions concerning the President of the United States," the statement said.

"The motives of those who generated the rumors and those who wrote these stories can only be explained by the reporters involved."

Master Sergeant Edward K. Kleizo, a 50-year-old Air Force veteran with service in Vietnam, said yesterday "this is the greatest honor I ever had; to shake the hand of the President is a great privilege. To have the President tap you on the cheek—I won't wash my face."

Asked if his son, John, 7, had not gone through the terminal saying "the President slapped my daddy," Kleizo replied: "Yes, he did, but he didn't mean it that way."

Kleizo said he had told Mr. Nixon he was "one of the greatest Presidents we've ever had and the President reached over and tapped his face—like a pat you give a basketball player after he's made a basket."

The incident came to light Sunday when one of the pool reporters on the President's plane told his colleagues what he had seen Saturday night.

There followed an angry debate in the White House Press Corps because the poolers had made no mention of the incident in the written pool report Saturday night. The poolers maintained that there was no significance to the incident, but late Sunday night they wrote a pool report and posted it in the press room here.

The Wall Street Journal, the New York Daily News and the St. Louis Post Dispatch filed stories about the incident, although the television networks and the majority of newspapers represented decided that there was insufficient basis for a story.

"Two members of the Saturday night pool observed an encounter that they thought at the time was insignificant and still do," Sunday night's posted pool report said.

Kleizo said no one from the White House staff had talked to him about the incident or the news reports. But Mrs. Kleizo said a lieutenant colonel had contacted her husband. Kleizo said no one told him what to say when questioned about the

incident.

Asked if Mr. Nixon seemed to be angry, Kleizo replied: "Oh, no, at no time whatsoever. No way. Impossible."

The two pool reporters were William Eaton of the Chicago Daily News and Matt Cooney of Westinghouse Broadcasting Corp.

As the President was shaking hands with spectators lined up along a fence, "he approached a short, balding man and his son," the report said.

The man reported, according to the poolers, that the President asked: "Are you the boy's mother or grandmother?"

"Neither," he replied.

"The President craned his neck for another look," the report said. "Bright floodlights at the airport might have affected his vision.

"Of course not," said the President. At the same time the President spoke he delivered a light slap to the man's face."

The two poolers said that "the light slap had the velocity that a man might use in slapping shaving lotion on his own face . . . the President did not appear to be angry, but may have been flustered by his mistake in identity. The President then went on to pose for pictures with a baby."

When one of the poolers asked the man what had occurred, he replied: "The President slapped me." The poolers then ran to board Air Force One, without getting the man's name.

Kleizo's picture appeared next day in the Orlando Sentinel because he was next to the mother with the baby who was photographed. Kleizo's identity became known yesterday.

Reached by telephone, Kleizo said he had used the word slapped, adding: "You don't say the President tapped me."

When John Kleizo was asked about the incident, he said the President thought he (his father) was my grandma. It was so dark and spotlights in his eyes."

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